

Olympic View and Middle Waterway State Aquatic Reserves



Site History

Olympic View and Middle Waterway are within Commencement Bay, a deepwater embayment of approximately 5,700 acres. Olympic View is located between the Middle and Thea Foss Waterways and is located within the harbor area. This site has been recently restored to resemble a natural nearshore environment. Middle Waterway is located to the west of the Puyallup River and includes the largest remnant mud flats in Commencement Bay.

These sites were among the first sites formally withdrawn from leasing by Commissioner of Public Lands Jennifer Belcher on May 11, 2000.

Aquatic Reserve Program

The Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) manages about 2.4 million acres of aquatic lands on behalf of the public. DNR established three types of reserves (WAC 332-30-151) to help ensure environmental protection for public aquatic lands - Education, Environmental and Scientific Reserves. Using this authority the Commissioner of Public Lands withdrew six sites from leasing to be considered for Aquatic Reserve status during 2000.

During 2002 DNR developed an environmental impact statement (EIS) for the Aquatic Reserves Program. The final EIS was adopted in September 2002.

Site Evaluation

All six sites withdrawn from leasing in 2000 will be evaluated for Aquatic Reserve status during 2003. Sites will be evaluated using designation criteria identified in the programmatic EIS. Guidance for the use of these designation criteria is currently being developed by DNR with the assistance of an external peer review committee.

Evaluation of the sites will be completed by a Technical Advisory Committee. DNR is currently collecting all available information regarding each of the six reserve sites through research and public meetings. The committee will evaluate this information and visit each site before making their recommendation to the Commissioner of Public Lands.

Natural Resources

The historic Commencement Bay and Puyallup River delta included: an extensive tidal freshwater floodplain of the meandering Puyallup River, including off-channel sloughs and wetlands; an expanding delta with numerous distributary channels; broad, expansive mudflat habitat; and an extensive estuarine transition zone between upland habitats and emergent marsh.

Today, more than 90% of this estuary habitat has been lost. Middle Waterway contains remnant mudflat habitat used by a variety of birds and fish, while Olympic view contains two small eelgrass beds.

Site Management

Following the determination by the Commissioner of Public Lands regarding Aquatic Reserve status, DNR will begin a State Environmental Protection Act (SEPA) public process to develop management plans for each site. This process will occur for sites designated as Aquatic Reserves as well as those that will no longer be part of the Aquatic Reserve Program.

DNR expects to work with many partners, including other agencies, tribes, local governments and organizations to develop and implement management plans for Aquatic Reserves.

Aquatic Reserve Timeline

